

**ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION**  
**4141 N. Third Street, Phoenix AZ 85012**  
**Thursday – February 12, 2009**

**M I N U T E S**

**Call to Order** - The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Vice Chairman Yamanouchi.

**Present**

Advisory Commissioners

Kenneth Yamanouchi, Chairman  
Linda Fulkerson, Vice Chairwoman  
Thomas Heaney  
Gary Fredricks  
Phillip Quochytewa Sr.  
Larry McKim  
Bill Lunsford  
Terrie Gent  
George Cushing

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

Joey Strickland, Director  
Robert Barnes, Deputy Director  
Dave Hampton, Public Information Officer  
Tom Creager, AZ State Veteran Home  
Administrator  
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Planner  
Lee Borgen, Veterans' Benefits Counselor

**Absent** – none

**Guests**

AZ Representative Patricia V. Fleming  
Joan Sisco, President Veterans First Ltd.  
Noel Benoist

**Opening** – Chairman Yamanouchi opened the meeting at 10:00 a.m. with appropriate ceremony and welcomed the guests.

**Minutes** – The minutes of January 10, 2009 were approved. Moved by Commissioner McKim and seconded by Commissioner Cushing.

**Communications:**

- December 16, 2008 letter from the Advisory Commission to The Honorable Jan Brewer, Arizona Secretary of State, signed by Chairman Yamanouchi.
- January 9, 2009 letter from Janice K. Brewer to Chairman Yamanouchi.
- January 23, 2009 letter from the Advisory Commission to Sandra Flint, Director, Dept. of Veterans' Affairs, Phoenix Regional Office, signed by Chairman Yamanouchi.
- Chairman Yamanouchi announced that Sandra Flint has indicated that every effort will be made to have a VA Regional Office representative at future Advisory Commission regional meetings.

**Agency Announcements:**

1. Director Strickland reported on Governor Brewer's first cabinet meeting.
  - Adherence to procurement procedures is a concern.
  - A cultural change is being implemented; everyone agreed to "agree to disagree" rather than fight over the budget; appropriate tone and demeanor will be observed with the Legislature.
  - The Governor is conducting a budget meeting with each agency to evaluate circumstances and find effective ways to address the continuing budget shortfalls.
  - The Governor and her cabinet is very pleased with the latest VA survey of the State Veteran Home.
  - Agencies will have more input during the development of the 2010 budget.
  - It is hoped that the Federal stimulus dollars received by the State will afford continued timely support for the Tucson veterans' home.

2. Deputy Director Barnes:

- Department funding for 2009 was reduced by \$428,000.00, but the department was able to absorb the loss with minimal impact on services.
- He thanked the Advisory Commission for their very proactive support of the department and their effective efforts in rallying the Arizona veterans' community in support of the department.
- The recent VA survey of the Home went very well and the diligent efforts of everyone were appreciated.
- Fiduciary now has two new employees who specialize in fiduciary legal matters and fiduciary accounting issues respectively. A detailed audit is in process and so far the books look good.
- There will be a meeting with the VA in March to reinstate fiduciary referrals to ADVS.
- The veterans' benefits program is of interest and concern to the legislature as they begin work on the 2010 budget. The sense seems to be that the legislature will try to protect the Agency budget, but a lot of hard decisions are required and the Agency may experience more cuts. The legislature does not yet understand the practical value of veterans' benefits counselors (VBC's).
- He will meet with Representative Andrew Tobin later in the week to explain the intrinsic value of VBC's to the State.
- During fiscal year 2007-2008, VBC's assisted in bringing \$890,000,000 into Arizona through payments to veterans, their dependents and survivors.
- The Veteran Services Division (VSD) has established a new accounting procedure to collect hard data for the legislators, about dollars and workload, to justify the need for veterans' benefits counselors throughout the state.
- Chairman Yamanouchi noted that it would be appropriate for the Advisory Commission to send a letter to the Governor supporting the Veterans' Services Division. There was extensive discussion on what information should be included and how best to present it.
- Commissioner Fredricks recommended that the Department develop a document for VSD, similar to a "white paper," that would focus on the VBC's, their cost, their function, the economic impact of their work etc. Deputy Director Barnes accepted the request for action.
- Commissioner Heaney observed that the VBC in the Tucson VA Medical Center has been moved to the Pima Plaza office. He asked that the Region Commissioners be notified when VBC service locations change, so that Commissioners may have accurate information to provide area residents.
- The Southern Arizona Veteran Cemetery beautification project is progressing nicely and the project for re-interment of the civil war soldiers' remains is on track for a May 2009 ceremony. Deputy Director Barnes noted that Joe Larson, the Cemetery Administrator, is doing an outstanding job.
- VSD will conduct VBC training for all hands later this month.
- Director Strickland will be in Washington DC later this month for meetings with other State Directors of Veterans' Affairs and Federal legislators.

3. Administrator Creager advised:

- The VA survey was very positive.
- Staff morale is good.
- Quarterly care and service meetings with the VA have been reinstated to improve communications.
- The State survey is coming up and should also see good results.
- A contract has been established with a private sector laundry service that will save the Home an average of \$25,000.00 per month.
- The current rehabilitation services' provider will be continued.
- The Home currently has 151 residents in-house plus three who are currently hospitalized.
- Referrals from the private sector have increased nicely.

- Chairman Yamanouchi asked how the home's staffing ratios compared with national nursing home averages. Mr. Creager indicated that it was high and that they were in the process of lowering the ratio.

#### **VFL projects update – Joan Sisco**

- Enduring Freedom Memorial appears to be on track. Maintenance funding passed the House. Senate action is still pending. The target date for dedication is October or November this year.
- The homeless women veterans' housing project is progressing well.
- The Phoenix stand down was very successful with 728 attendees, 6% of whom were homeless female veterans.
- Commissioner Fredricks suggested that the Director call a meeting of the Enduring Freedom Commission and ask them to consider sending a letter to the legislature in further support of funding for the memorial.
- Commissioner Fredricks commented that he had occasion to attend the stand down and was very impressed:
  - > Provider participation was excellent.
  - > Some 200 court cases were resolved for homeless individuals.

#### **Region 3 meeting in Tucson 1/10/09**

1. Chairman Yamanouchi thanked Commissioners McKim, Gent and Heaney for the excellent results of their diligent work on the Tucson meeting. He solicited ideas on what went right that may be applied to future events and where improvements could be made.
2. There was an extensive brainstorming session that produced numerous ideas including:
  - Work on a region meeting should start at least four months out.
  - Maximize use of e-mail and follow up with personal phone calls to legislators and local dignitaries.
  - Maximize use of media publicity.
  - Make optimal use of the local VBC's.
  - Choose the date and location carefully with consideration of local weather/travel conditions and other events in the area that the Region meeting might join with or that may compete for local participation.
  - Focus more on education: ADVS the agency, the practical application of its programs and services and the functional role of the Commission as a whole.
  - Focus more on policy issues rather than individual problems.
  - Speakers should speak from the front of the room and repeat the essence of the question so that all may hear and understand the context of the dialogue.
  - Vice Chair Fulkerson reminded everyone of the need to maintain a professional appearance.
  - The local VAMC and the Phoenix VA Regional Office need to be represented by people who have the capability to authoritatively address specific issues about eligibility for medical and pharmacy services, and VA disability claims processing and education benefits respectively.
  - When Commissioners are appointed, some consideration should be given to where they live. It would be advantageous to have commissioners from throughout the state rather than primarily from the metropolitan areas. The Department level of the various service organizations should be encouraged to solicit Commissioner candidates from outlying posts, chapters and detachments in addition to the local entities.
3. Commissioner Fredricks observed that the Commission's outreach program as a whole needs to be thoroughly reviewed and updated.
  - He moved for the establishment of a subcommittee to review and revise the Commission's outreach program. The motion was seconded by Commissioner McKim and passed unanimously.

- Commissioners Cushing, Lunsford and McKim volunteered to serve on the committee and Commissioner McKim volunteered to be the Chairman.

**Review of follow up actions** – deferred to March meeting.

**Recommendations to Governor Brewer** – Chair Yamanouchi requested comments on his draft letter. The letter was approved, subject to a minor edit, on motion by Commissioner McKim, second by Commissioner Heaney.

**Legislative update** – Dave Hampton, provided a copy of his weekly legislative update and gave a brief overview.

1. The legislature's primary focus is the budget.
2. Commissioner Fredricks observed that the Commission needs a legislative subcommittee to review bills so that the Commission may effectively advise the Director and Governor in accordance with the Commission's strategic plan.
3. Commissioner Fulkerson noted that two bills currently in the legislature are based on last year's recommendations from the Veterans' Research Council.
  - She moved for the establishment of a legislative subcommittee to come up with a position paper for relevant pending legislation. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gent and approved unanimously.
  - Commissioners Fredricks, Fulkerson and Gent volunteered to served on the subcommittee and report back at the March 2009 meeting.

**Review Plan to Implement the Commission's Strategic Plan:**

- Commissioner Fredricks continued the page by page review of the plan previously distributed to the Commissioners for review and feedback. He will incorporate the edits and e-mail a copy to the Commission secretary for appropriate technical processing and distribution.
- Chairman Yamanouchi thanked Commissioner Fredricks for his initiative in developing the document.

**Public comments** – Chairman Yamanouchi invited brief comments from Mr. Noel Benoist.

- There is a national group promoting the wearing of blue on Friday to support the troops.
- He is working on his campaign to become Mayor of Apache Junction.
- Apache Junction needs a resident VBC. The new city council will support having a VBC located in the City Hall complex.

**Comments for the good of the Commission** – Commissioner Quochytewa suggested that a provision for newly appointed commissioners to attend a State ethics class be included in the Commission's operational plan.

**Adjournment** – Chairman Yamanouchi adjourned the meeting at 12:00 p.m. (Moved by Commissioner McKim and seconded by Commissioner Cushing.) The next meeting will be held at 10:00 a.m. on March 12, 2009 at the Arizona State Veteran Home, 4141 North Third Street, Phoenix Arizona.

Respectfully submitted,

S. Lee Borgen  
Secretary